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REMARKS BY U.S. AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT

USAID-sponsored National Conference on the National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking in Bangladesh

March 31, 2016

Honorable Minister for Home Affairs, Asaduzzaman Khan;

Honorable Senior Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dr. Md. Mozammel Hoque Khan;

Honorable Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Dr. Chowdhury Md. Babul Hassan,

Honorable Secretary of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Mr. ASSM Zahirul Haque

Honorable Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Abu Hena Md. Rahmatul Muneem;

Honorable Secretary-in-Charge, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment; Begum Shamsun Nahar

Distinguished government officials and representatives from civil society;

Esteemed colleagues, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen:

Assalamu aleikum, nomoshkar, and good afternoon.

I am pleased to be with you today for this important event, and I thank you all for joining us. This conference has provided a valuable opportunity to take stock and assess Bangladesh's accomplishments in combatting human trafficking.

Even more important, this event has been an opportunity to focus directly on the National Plan of Action and carefully examine the challenges to implementing it. My hope is that we will now be able to take the next step and transform these discussions and recommendations into concrete actions. It is the concrete actions that will make the National Plan of Action come alive and produce the positive results we are all seeking. There are many Bangladeshis—many men, many women, and many children—who are counting on us to prevent the crime of human trafficking and the many other crimes that are often associated with it; additional crimes which sometimes even include murder.

Human trafficking is something that the United States Government takes very seriously, both around the world, and here in Bangladesh. We are tackling the scourge of human trafficking in partnership with governments, with other donors and international organizations, NGOs, and even with the private sector.

Such partnerships—strong partnerships—are required in order to combat human trafficking. We saw the magnitude of this problem vividly last year during the Andaman Sea crisis. Complex problems transnational crime calls for coordinated, strong, and strategic action. Experience teaches us that we truly need to work together if we are to successfully stop these crimes.

Only by working together can we stem these crimes, not only in Bangladesh, but around the world.

As you know,I am proud to say that the United States Government has partnered with the Government of Bangladesh to help prevent trafficking, rehabilitate and empower trafficking survivors, expand public awareness, and ensure justice for survivors. An important part of this effort is working directly with civil society to enlist local civil society organizations in this fight. USAID's Bangladesh Counter Trafficking-in-Persons program has worked closely with nine local NGOs in some of the most trafficking-prone districts. These NGOs, of course, focus on the "4 Ps:" prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership.

These NGO partners are working closely to support the implementation of the National Plan of Action. They, for example, have conducted public awareness campaigns at the community level, reaching more than 1.6 million people. They also work closely with counter-trafficking committees, assist survivors, and are developing formal referral systems for providing victim support services at the district level.

These and other efforts are accomplishing great things. I have met people whose lives, rather than being devastated by their experience, have instead become educated, started businesses and rejoined families who learned to support, not shun them. At Yetthe same time, there is far, far more that needs to be done. We need to do more. And we need to do it together.

I want to echo the sentiments of Secretary John Kerry: no single organization, ministry, government, or nation can end modern slavery alone. Each of us has an important role to play if we are to stop human trafficking.

Government, in particular, is in a unique position to make a major difference by espousing effective policies that address the root causes of trafficking and enforcing the rule of law to put perpetrators behind bars.

I want to thank the Honorable Minister, the Honorable Secretaries, and all of our partners from the Bangladesh government for their continued commitment. I strongly believe that each ministry present today has an important role to play in successfully implementing the National Plan of Action. You are each well-positioned to address existing challenges and identify a course of action for your respective ministries to implement the National Plan.

As an important next step, I want to ask that the government finalize the implementing rules to facilitate a full implementation of the 2012 anti-trafficking law. These rules are needed to clarify vague sections of the law, close loopholes, and provide the legal basis to prosecute the perpetrators of these heinous crimes more effectively. The United States stands ready to support the Government of Bangladesh to ensure that these rules are effectively implemented.

On behalf of the United States Government, I want you to know that we remain fully committed to working with all of our partners to successfully implement the National Plan of Action. Let us all dedicate ourselves to do everything we can to stop the crime of human trafficking and ensure the rights and dignity of each and every human being.

Thank gain, thank you for being here today and thank you for your personal commitment to addressing this extremely important issue.

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**As prepared for delivered*